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ABSTRACT

A study investigated whether three types of journalistic material--news stories, news articles, and news reports--could be reliably distinguished from one another, and whether these genres had differential appeal to audiences. News reports are defined as succinct reports of facts, while news articles represent a more analytic form of reporting, and news stories have traces of literary quality. A content analysis of the November 1, 1985 issue of the Richmond "News Leader" was combined with an existing readership survey of that issue. Ninety-seven news stories were classified by two coders according to the categories of reports, articles, and stories. Respondents, 357 adult residents of Richmond, Virginia, were questioned by professional interviewers, who determined whether readers "noticed," "read some," or "read most" of all items in the newspaper of 30 lines or longer. Answers were then weighted to represent 514 cases. Findings revealed that intercoder reliability was high; thus, it was possible to distinguish reports from stories. (There were no articles in this issue of the paper.) Mean readership attention scores (combining the readership of persons of both sexes, and various ages, incomes, and educational levels) revealed that reports and stories received significantly different browsing attention, with stories winning more attention than reports. On the other hand, reports received significantly higher attention than stories when the criterion was reading more than half of the full text. (Two references and three tables are attached.) (ARH)

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Impact of Journalism Genres on Readership

When journalists talk about the material they prepare for publication, a number of descriptive terms are used synonymously. Journalists write and edit stories, articles and news reports. By and large, these labels are interchangeable. But careful reflection suggests that important distinctions can be made among these three types of journalistic material. Further thought also suggests that all types of journalistic material may not have the same influence on audiences. In other words, different types of news items may have different impact and effects on audiences.

In his critique of a series of political communication papers at the 1985 International Communication Association convention and in speculating on the newspaper of the future for a Western daily, McCombs elaborated the distinctions among three types of news items, distinctions defining three genres, if you will, of journalistic writing. This paper represents the initial empirical exploration of this conceptualization of three journalistic genres.

News reports are the staple of daily journalism. These items consist of the succinct reporting of facts, usually the key, newsworthy facts about a news event. Here the ritual formula of journalism -- who, what, when, but seldom

why -- is applied to some news event. The emphasis is on straightforward reporting, and the task of the writer is to convey empirical, documentable or attributable facts with maximum conciseness and clarity. In this facet of journalism our traditional news values and heavy preoccupation with news events are at the forefront. All the staples of daily journalism, city council meetings, speeches, release of official statements and reports, trials and police reports, are most commonly presented as news reports. The typical accident, crime or fire report and obituary are the epitome of this style of news writing.

News articles represent a more analytic form of reporting and writing than the news report. Typically, news articles involve a greater effort at synthesis of the facts, pulling together material from a number of sources and number of perspectives in order to arrive at a reliable and valid picture of the situation under discussion. Some news reports achieve a kind of balance through the presentation of statements from several sources, but typically news reports are a simple mechanical balancing of facts rather than any real effort at synthesis. Commonly, news reports rely upon a single source or a few sources available at the site of a news event. Writing an article involves considerably more than gathering a few facts and presenting them succinctly and accurately. Preparation of an article requires thorough reporting and thoughtful writing.

News stories are a form of news presentation with traces of literary quality. There always has been a permeable boundary between literature and journalism. Writers like Samuel Clemens, Theodore Dreiser, Ernest Hemingway, and Norman Mailer are well known for the journalistic roots of their literary reputations. Recent decades have produced a proliferation of styles that combine the elements of journalism and literature. For the purposes of this overview, these will be considered a single genre.

On a less grand scale, nearly every issue of a daily newspaper contains at least one story about some local person or situation. And it is a story in the full sense of the word. The theme or focus selected for the story is based as much on its literary quality as it is for the central meaning of the situation. Facts are gathered and reported largely on the basis of their contribution to the story. Within this genre the journalist is a story teller, with all that implies, rather than the impartial synthesizer of facts.

In brief, reports, articles and stories can be distinguished from one another with respect to their presentation form, the ways facts are handled and the narrative roles of journalists. Distinctive characteristics of these three types of news items are outlined in Table 1.

As seen in Table 1, while reports have a succinct form and articles represent an analytic form, stories have traces

of literacy quality. Report writers achieve a simple mechanical ordering of facts while article writers execute an impartial synthesizing of facts. In contrast, story writers select facts largely on the basis of their contribution to the story. As a result, the roles of journalists vary for these three different types of news items. While report writers are straightforward conveyers, article writers are analytical presenters and story writers are entertaining story tellers.

The purpose of this paper is to test the propositions that (A) methodologically, these three journalistic genres can be reliably distinguished from one another, and that (B) theoretically, these genres have differential appeal to audiences.

If reliable empirical distinctions can be made among three types of news items, then readers also may notice the differences and pay different amounts of attention to each type of news items. Consequently, the type of news items which receives high attention may be more influential than those which receive low attention. Specifically, this paper examines the reliability of the data on the type of news items and the impact of types of news items on the level of attention each item receives. It is an initial attempt to establish the utility of this conceptualization for the analysis of journalism.

Methodology

To pursue the purpose of this paper, an expanded content analysis of the November 1, 1985 issue of the Richmond News Leader was combined with an existing readership survey of that issue. The original content analysis of the Richmond News Leader classified each of the 203 items into one of the following five format categories: news story, feature, opinions, listings and comics-photos. In the expansion of this content analysis by the authors each of the 97 news stories and features was further placed in one of the three categories elaborated in this paper: reports, articles and stories.

The readership survey of the Richmond News Leader used here as the source of the dependent variable measures of attention was conducted with a random sample of adult residents (18 years of age or more) of the urbanized area of Richmond, Va., on November 2, 1985. A total of 357 personal interviews was completed by professional interviewers. These actual interviews were then weighted to bring representation of the City of Richmond and the counties of Chesterfield and Henrico into proportions which reflected those of the urbanized area. This procedure resulted in a total of 514 weighted cases, which became the basis for the measures used here.

For all items in that issue of the newspaper of 30 lines or longer, readership was measured in three ways:

Noticed: read headline only, art-photo only or headline and art only.

Read Some: read some portion of the text.

Read Most: read more than one-half of the text.

Analysis

The independent variable, type of news item, theoretically has three categories, reports, articles and stories. But there was no article in the newspaper analyzed, so the independent variable in the analysis is reduced to two levels. Although there were 80 reports and 17 stories, for only 49 out of 80 reports was readership measured in depth. Therefore, 49 reports and 17 stories are available for readership analysis.

Findings

Coding decisions on the genre employed, report or story, were checked by having a second analyst code 60 randomly selected stories and reports out of the 97 news stories and features found in that issue of the Richmond News Leader. The intercoder reliability coefficient computed using Holsti's (1969) formula was .933 for the type

category (C.R. = 2(56)/60+60). The two coders agreed on 93.3 % of their coding decisions on the types of news items. Since Holsti's formula does not take the chance level into account, an agreement coefficient based on Krippendorff's (1980) formula also was calculated. Krippendorff's α was .762 (α = 1-4/(8.396+8.396)). The agreement between two coders turned out to be 76.2 % above chance. Reports and stories can be reliably distinguished from each other.

Turning to the second aspect of this study, mean attention scores for reports and stories are presented in Tables 2 and 3. For ease of interpretation the mean level of attention for each genre -- that is, the average number of respondents looking at that type of news item -- has been reported in Tables 2 and 3 as the percentage of respondents reading that type of item on the average.

The tables display two levels of attention to news items, **Browsing** and **Reading**. **Browsing** is defined as attention to half or less of the item. This incorporates two levels of attention reported in the original survey, "Noticed" and "Read Some". Preliminary analysis of the data yielded similar results for these two measures of attention. **Reading** is defined as attention to more than half of the full text.

In Table 2, nine of the 10 comparisons show significant differences between the browsing of reports and stories. The latter consistently receives more attention.

In detail for **Browsing**, on the average 20.1 % of all the respondents browsed reports while on the average 28.1 % of all the respondents browsed stories. The observed difference between mean readership for reports and that for stories was statistically significant ($t=-2.606$, $df=64$, $p<.05$, two-tailed).

For the male **Browsers**, on the average 22.7 % of all the men browsed reports while on the average 31.3 % of all the men browsed stories. The observed difference between mean readership for reports and that for stories was statistically significant ($t=-2.682$, $df=64$, $p<.01$, two-tailed).

For the female **Browsers**, on the average 17.8 % of all the women browsed reports while on the average 25.3 % of all the women browsed stories. The observed difference between mean readership for reports and that for stories was statistically significant ($t=-2.384$, $df=64$. $p<.05$, two-tailed).

For the young **Browsers**, on the average 22.7 % of all the younger respondents browsed reports while on the average 36.0 % of all the younger respondents browsed stories. The observed difference between mean readership for reports and that for stories was statistically significant ($t=-3.806$, $df=64$, $p<.01$, two-tailed).

For the old **Browsers**, on the average 18.3 % of all the older respondents browsed reports while on the average 23.0

% of all the older respondents browsed stories. The observed difference between mean readership for reports and that for stories, however, was not statistically significant at the .05 level ($t=-1.574$, $df=64$, n.s., two-tailed).

For the low-income **Browsers**, on the average 21.0 % of all the low-income respondents browsed reports while on the average 31.9 % of all the low-income respondents browsed stories. The observed differences between mean readership for reports and that for stories was statistically significant ($t=-3.111$, $df=64$, $p<.01$, two-tailed).

For the high-income **Browsers**, on the average 20.4 % of all the high-income respondents browsed reports while on the average 26.7 % of all the high-income respondents browsed stories. The observed difference between mean readership for reports and that for stories was statistically significant ($t=-2.109$, $df=64$, $p<.05$, two-tailed).

For the low educated **Browsers**, on the average 17.4 % of all the low educated respondents browsed reports while on the average 27.5 % of all the low educated respondents browsed stories. The observed difference between mean readership for reports and that for stories was statistically significant ($t=-2.893$, $df=64$, $p<.01$, two-tailed)

For the moderately educated **Browsers**, on the average 23.1 % of all the moderately educated respondents browsed reports while on the average 30.7 % of all the moderately

educated respondents browsed stories. The observed difference between mean readership for reports and that for stories was statistically significant ($t=-2.333$, $df=64$, $p<.05$, two-tailed).

For the highly educated **Browsers**, on the average 19.5 % of all the highly educated respondents browsed reports while on the average 26.1 % of all the highly educated respondents browsed stories. The observed difference between mean readership for reports and that for stories was statistically significant ($t=-2.262$, $df=64$, $p<.05$, two-tailed).

In short, reports and stories received significantly different browsing attention. By this criterion, stories win more attention than reports.

On the other hand, Table 3 shows that reports receive higher attention than stories when the criterion is reading more than half of the full text. Five of the 10 comparisons in Table 3 achieve statistical significance.

In detail for **Reading**, while on the average 18.1 % of all the respondents read reports, on the average only 13.8 % of all the respondents read stories. The observed difference between mean readership for reports and that for stories was statistically significant ($t=2.075$, $df=56.1$, $p<.05$, two-tailed).

For the male **Readers**, while on the average 18.9 % of all the men read reports, on the average 16.4 % of all the

men read stories. The observed difference between mean readership for reports and that for stories, however, was not statistically significant at the .05 level (t=0.914, df=64, n.s., two-tailed).

For the female **Readers**, while on the average 17.3 % of all the women read reports, on the average 11.5 % of all the women read stories. The observed difference between mean readership for reports and that for stories was statistically significant (t=2.461, df=61.3, $p<.05$, two-tailed).

For the young **Readers**, while on the average 15.1 % of all the younger respondents read reports, on the average 12.1 % of all the younger respondents read stories. The observed difference between mean readership for reports and that for stories, however, was not statistically significant at the .05 level (t=1.270, df=48.4, n.s., two-tailed).

For the old **Readers**, while on the average 19.7 % of all the older respondents read reports, on the average 14.8 % of all the older respondents read stories. The observed difference between mean readership for reports and that for stories was statistically significant (t=2.214, df=52.9, $p<.05$, two-tailed).

For the low-income **Readers**, while on the average 17.1 % of all the low-income respondents read reports, on the average 12.4 % of all the low-income respondents read stories. The observed difference between mean readership

for reports and that for stories was statistically significant ($t=2.088$, $df=61$, $p<.05$, two-tailed).

For the high-income **Readers**, while on the average 18.8 % of all the high-income respondents read reports, on the average 15.2 % of all the high-income respondents read stories. The observed difference between mean readership for reports and that for stories, however, was not statistically significant at the .05 level ($t=1.693$, $df=44.9$, n.s., two-tailed).

For the low educated **Readers**, while on the average 17.8 % of all the low educated respondents read reports, on the average 11.7 % of all the low educated respondents read stories. The observed difference between mean readership for reports and that for stories was statistically significant ($t=3.275$, $df=61.8$, $p<.01$, two-tailed).

For the moderately educated **Readers**, while on the average 16.5 % of all the moderately educated respondents read reports, on the average 11.7 % of all the moderately educated respondents read stories. The observed difference between mean readership for reports and that for stories, however, was not statistically significant at the .05 level ($t=1.805$, $df=48$, n.s., two-tailed).

For the highly educated **Readers**, while on the average 19.7 % of all the highly educated respondents read reports, on the average 16.9 % of all the highly educated respondents read stories. The observed difference between mean

readership for reports and that for stories, however, was not statistically significant at the .05 level (t=0.986, df=64, n.s., two-tailed).

In short, reports win more sustained attention than stories. Overall, the findings here that more readers browse stories than reports, but that reports win more sustained reading, support the enduring proposition that newspaper readers are more interested in their daily newspaper as a source of information than of entertainment.

References

Holsti, O. (1969). Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

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Table 1:
Distinctive characteristics of
reports, articles and stories

	Reports	Articles	Stories
Presentation form	Succinct form	Analytic form	Literary style
Ways to handle facts	Mechanical balancing of facts	Impartial synthesizing of facts	Selective gathering of facts
Roles of journalists	Straightforward conveyer	Analytical presenter	Entertaining story teller

Table 2:
Percentage of mean readership
for reports and stories

Browsing	Type			
	Reports (n=49)	Stories (n=17)	df	T value
All (n=514)	20.1	28.1	64.0	-2.606 *
Men (n=239)	22.7	31.3	64.0	-2.682 **
Women (n=275)	17.8	25.3	64.0	-2.384 *
Young (n=193)	22.7	36.0	64.0	-3.806 **
Old (n=321)	18.3	23.0	64.0	-1.574
Low Income (n=221)	21.0	31.9	64.0	-3.111 **
High Income (n=266)	20.4	26.7	64.0	-2.109 *
Low Education (n=153)	17.4	27.5	64.0	-2.893 **
Moderate Education (n=179)	23.1	30.7	64.0	-2.333 *
High Education (n=180)	19.5	26.1	64.0	-2.262 *

* p<.05 (two-tailed t-test)
** p<.01 (two-tailed t-test)

"Young" refers to under age 34 and "Old" refers to 34 years of age or more. "Low Income" refers to under income $ 35, 000 a year and "High Income" refers to $ 35, 000 of income a year or more. "Low Education" refers to less than high school graduation and "Moderate Education" refers to technical and vocational school graduation and partial attendance at the college. "High Education" refers to more than college graduation.

Table 3:
Percentage of mean readership
for reports and stories

Reading	Type			
	Reports (n=49)	Stories (n=17)	df	T value
All (n=514)	18.1	13.8	56.1	2.075 *
Men (n=239)	18.9	16.4	64.0	0.914
Women (n=275)	17.3	11.5	61.3	2.461 *
Young (n=193)	15.1	12.1	48.4	1.270
Old (n=321)	19.7	14.8	52.9	2.214 *
Low Income (n=221)	17.1	12.4	61.0	2.088 *
High Income (n=266)	18.8	15.2	44.9	1.693
Low Education (n=153)	17.8	11.7	61.8	3.275 **
Moderate Education (n=179)	16.5	11.7	48.0	1.805
High Education (n=180)	19.7	16.9	64.0	0.986

* $p<.05$ (two-tailed t-test)
** $p<.01$ (two-tailed t-test)

"Young" refers to under age 34 and "Old" refers to 34 years of age or more. "Low Income" refers to under income $ 35, 000 a year and "High Income" refers to $ 35, 000 of income a year or more. "Low Education" refers to less than high school graduation and "Moderate Income" refers to technical and vocational school graduation and partial attendance at the college. "High Education" refers to more than college graduation.